



Breaking Barriers: a Conversation with Two Bengali Dalit Writers

moderator and translator **Dr. Runa Chakraborty Paunksnis** is in an online conversation with **Raju Das and Namita Das**

Tuesday, October 27th at 3 pm in India (11.30 am Israel, 10.30 am France, 9.30 am UK)

How to connect: <https://huji.zoom.us/j/85448072950?>

PASSWORD to the session is the date of the session in the format DDMMYYYY. That is, if the session would be on October 12th 2020, the password would be 12102020. Please contact Marina (marina.rimscha@mail.huji.ac.il) should you have trouble connecting.

פורום הודו



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Does caste matter in West Bengal? The question is not new anymore, but it has certainly not become a cliché. It still holds relevance given the hostility of the mainstream elite Bengali literary society which denounces the endeavour of Bengali Dalit writers to etch a separate identity of their own. Although the root of Bengali Dalit literature can be traced back to the late 19th century, it was not recognized at the national and international levels until recently. Authors such as Manoranjan Byapari and Kalyani Thakur Charal are no longer strangers to Indian readers and scholars studying Dalit literature. Yet, many contemporary Bengali Dalit writers who have the potential to bring significant changes in the field of Bengali literature and theatre are still not known to the wider reading public. Raju Das and Namita Das are two such names. The couple has been writing and performing Bengali Dalit plays for more than fifty years. Not only they published stories and anthologies of plays, they also founded their own drama groups. The first group “Shantikunjo Natuke Dol”, which was established in 1977, is still actively performing in and outside Kolkata. The second drama group “Shantikunjo Blind Natya Academy”, which has twenty-one visually –challenged actors, was established in 2009. The zeal of Raju and Namita Das is truly admirable. Despite societal challenges and financial constraints they have been writing, performing and advocating Dalit rights with sincerity and dedication.

“Breaking Barriers: Conversation with Two Bengali Dalit Writers” is an hour-long interactive session which will focus on the work of Raju Das and Namita Das and the challenges they encounter. The couple will perform a short play in Bengali, written and directed by them. The gist of the play along with introductory comments will be provided in English by the moderator before the beginning of the performance. The moderator will also read out an excerpt from the play which she has translated in English from the original Bengali version. Finally, there will be a question-answer session where the audience can interact with the performers. The aim of this session is to create space for meaningful critical dialogue which will enable us to break barriers between the “Centre” and the “Margins”.





Dr. Runa Chakraborty Paunksnis.

Runa is currently teaching at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities in Kaunas University of Technology, Lithuania. Her research areas include Dalit Literature, Gender and Media studies. Her scholarly writings have been published in several peer-reviewed journals and edited volumes. Runa is also a creative writer and translator. Her translated stories have been published by the Orient BlackSwan and Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, India.

Co-conveners:

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